

Appendix A: Wilderness Recommendation Process Inventory and Evaluation Criteria for Lands That May Be Suitable as Wilderness

The following criteria are taken directly from the USDA Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70). These criteria are summarized in the main body of the Chugach National Forest Wilderness Area Inventory and Evaluation document.

71.1 – Inventory Process

The Interdisciplinary Team should start the inventory process by considering existing, relevant information identified during the assessment phase (FSH 1909.12, ch. 10), including information about designated areas (such as inventoried roadless areas), transportation infrastructure (such as road maintenance levels), and past or pending wilderness recommendation proposals. Building on this information and any additional public input (sec. 70.61 of this Handbook), the Interdisciplinary Team should apply the criteria and steps identified in section 71.2 of this Handbook to create the inventory.

71.2 – Inventory Steps and Criteria

Include an area in the inventory when:

1. The area meets the size criteria defined in section 71.21 and has no improvements; or
2. The area meets the size criteria defined in section 71.21 and is consistent with the improvements criteria defined in sections 71.22a and 71.22b.

After applying the size and improvements criteria, the Responsible Official shall also review the information provided through public participation during the assessment or as part of the wilderness recommendation process (sec. 70.61 of this Handbook), including areas that have been proposed for consideration as recommended wilderness through a previous planning process, collaborative effort, or in pending legislation. The Responsible Official may include in the inventory additional areas identified as part of that review that do not meet the criteria in sections 71.21 and 71.22 of this Handbook, for the purpose of carrying such areas forward to the evaluation step.

71.21 – Size Criteria

According to the Wilderness Act, a wilderness area “[h]as at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition” (16 U.S.C. 1131c).

Areas to be included in the inventory must be federal lands and must meet one of the following size criteria:

1. The area contains 5,000 acres or more.
2. The area contains less than 5,000 acres but is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, including but not limited to areas contiguous to an existing wilderness, primitive areas, administratively recommended wilderness, or wilderness inventory of other Federal ownership.

71.22 – Improvements Criteria

Pursuant to the Wilderness Act, include in the inventory areas “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean . . . an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improve-

ments or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; . . .” (16 U.S.C. 1131c).

Include areas in the inventory that meet size criteria in 71.21 of this Handbook and both sets of improvements criteria described in the following sections.

71.22a – Road Improvements

When considering road-related criteria, the Responsible Official shall ensure the Interdisciplinary Team uses existing information contained in the assessment about roads and routes within the plan area and information gathered from public and governmental participation opportunities (sec. 70.61 of this Handbook) as follows:

1. Include in the inventory areas that contain the following road improvement attributes if the areas also meet the other inventory criteria (secs. 71.21 and 71.22b of this Handbook):
 - a. Areas that contain forest roads maintained to level 1;
 - b. Areas with any routes that are decommissioned, unauthorized or temporary, or forest roads that are identified for decommissioning in a previous decision document, or identified as likely unneeded in a travel management plan (36 CFR 212.51) or a travel analysis (36 CFR 212.5(b));
 - c. Areas with forest roads that will be reclassified to level 1 through a previous decision document, or as identified in a travel management plan (36 CFR 212.51) or a travel analysis (36 CFR 212.5(b));
 - d. Areas in Forests, Grasslands, Prairies, and other Administrative Units east of the 100th meridian with forest roads maintained to level 2 that are identified as closed to motor vehicles yearlong in a previous decision document, or as identified in a travel management plan (36 CFR 212.51) or a travel analysis (36 CFR 212.5(b));
 - e. Areas with forest roads that have been proposed by the Forest Service for consideration as recommended wilderness as a result of a previous forest planning process; or areas with forest roads that the Responsible Official merits for inclusion in the inventory that were proposed for consideration through public involvement during the assessment or other public or intergovernmental participation opportunity (sec. 70.61).
 - f. Areas with historical wagon routes, historical mining routes, or other settlement era transportation features considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.
 - g. Areas with maintenance level 2 roads that do not meet the criteria for exclusion in subsection 2(c) below.
2. Except as provided in (1)(b), (c), (d) or (e) above, exclude from the inventory areas that contain:
 - a. Permanently authorized roads validated by a Federal court or the Department of the Interior for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded.
 - b. Forest roads maintained to levels 3, 4, or 5.
 - c. Level 2 roads, or level 3, 4, or 5 roads that will be reclassified to level 2 through a previous decision document, or as identified in a travel management plan (36 CFR 212.51) or a travel analysis (36 CFR 212.5(b)) that meet one or more of the following criteria and are not in proposed areas as provided in (1)(e) above:
 - i. Have been improved and are maintained by mechanical means to ensure relatively regular and continued use,
 - ii. Have cumulatively degraded wilderness character or precluded future preservation of the area as wilderness,
 - iii. Have been identified for continued public access and use in a project level or travel planning decision supported by NEPA analysis, or

- iv. Otherwise preclude evaluation and consideration of the area during the public participation and intergovernmental outreach processes as potentially suitable for wilderness, based on assessment information or on-the-ground knowledge.

71.22b – Other Improvements

After identifying lands within the plan area that meet the size criteria (sec. 71.21 of this Handbook) and the road improvement criteria (sec. 71.22a of this Handbook), determine whether those lands contain other improvements. Include such lands in the inventory where the other improvements or evidence of past human activities are not substantially noticeable in the area as a whole, including when the area contains the following, also recognizing the potential need to provide for passive or active restoration of wilderness character in previously modified areas, consistent with the intent of the Eastern Wilderness Act:

1. Airstrips and heliports.
2. Vegetation treatments that are not substantially noticeable.
3. Timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not substantially noticeable.
4. Permanently installed vertical structures, such as electronic installations that support television, radio, telephone, or cellular communications, provided their impacts, as well as their maintenance and access needs, are minimal.
5. Areas of mining activity where impacts are not substantially noticeable.
6. Range improvement areas (FSM 2240.5), involving minor structural improvements (for example, fences or water troughs) and nonstructural improvements (such as chaining, burning, spraying, potholing, and so forth) that are not substantially noticeable.
7. Recreation improvements, such as occupancy spots, or minor hunting or outfitter camps. As a general rule, developed sites should not be included. Areas with minor, easily removable recreation developments may be included.
8. Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and powerlines if a right-of-way has not been cleared. Powerlines with cleared rights-of-way, pipelines, and other permanently installed linear right-of-way structures should not be included.
9. Watershed treatment areas (such as contouring, diking, channeling) that are not substantially noticeable. Areas may include minor watershed treatments that have been accomplished manually such as small hand-constructed gully plugs.
10. Lands adjacent to development or activities that impact opportunities for solitude. The fact that nonwilderness activities or uses can be seen or heard from within any portion of the area, must not, of itself, preclude inclusion in the inventory. It is appropriate to extend boundaries to the edges of development for purposes of inclusion in the inventory.
11. Structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area.
12. Areas with improvements that have been proposed by the Forest Service for consideration as recommended wilderness as a result of a previous Forest planning process or that the Responsible Official merits for inclusion in the inventory that were proposed for consideration through public or intergovernmental participation opportunities (sec. 70.61 of this Handbook).

71.3 – Inventory Documentation

The Responsible Official shall ensure the Interdisciplinary Team documents the process used to identify and inventory areas. The purpose is to present a transparent description of how the inventory process was conducted and the results of the inventory.

The Responsible Official should release the inventory documentation and the map(s) described below to the public before conducting the evaluation. The Responsible Official shall also include the documentation required by this section in the applicable NEPA documents.

The Interdisciplinary Team shall record all lands included in the inventory on a map of the planning area. In addition, the Team shall identify on the same map (or a series of maps), at a minimum, the following lands:

1. Existing designated wilderness and primitive areas.

2. Congressionally designated wilderness study areas, and any wilderness proposals pending before Congress. Indicate relevant statutory dates, if any.
3. Areas identified in the Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Final Environmental Impact Statement (Volume 2, November 2000), or in a Forest Service State-specific roadless rule, or identified as undeveloped or for primitive nonmotorized management in the current land management plan.
4. National Forest System lands statutorily designated for management for non-wilderness purposes. Indicate effective dates, if any.
5. Other areas that the Responsible Official determines would be useful to show on the map to facilitate effective and transparent public participation and input on this topic.

72 – EVALUATION

The primary function of the evaluation step is to evaluate, pursuant to criteria set forth in the Wilderness Act of 1964, the wilderness characteristics of the lands included in the inventory. All lands included in the inventory must be evaluated. The Responsible Official may divide or consolidate lands identified in the inventory into grouped areas for the purpose of evaluation, and may vary the scope of the evaluation based on the specific characteristics of each area or portions thereof.

The Responsible Official should provide opportunities for public and governmental participation when evaluating lands identified in the inventory (sec. 70.61 of this Handbook). The Responsible Official should communicate the evaluation process to the public, and shall be able to clearly and efficiently describe and document the wilderness character associated with each area at the end of the evaluation step.

The Responsible Official is not required to carry all lands evaluated forward for further NEPA analysis as potential recommendations for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (secs. 73 and 74 of this Handbook).

72.1 – Evaluation of Wilderness Characteristics

The Interdisciplinary Team shall evaluate areas, which must include all lands identified in the inventory (sec. 71 of this Handbook), to determine potential suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System using criteria included in the Wilderness Act of 1964, section 2(c), as follows:

1. Evaluate the degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable (apparent naturalness). Consider such factors as:
 - a. a. The composition of plant and animal communities. The purpose of this factor is to determine if plant and animal communities appear substantially unnatural (for example, past management activities have created a plantation style forest with trees of a uniform species, age, and planted in rows);
 - b. b. The extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention; and
 - c. c. The extent to which improvements included in the area (sec. 71.22 of this Handbook) represent a departure from apparent naturalness.
2. Evaluate the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. The word "or" means that an area only has to possess one or the other. The area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre.
 - a. Consider impacts that are pervasive and influence a visitor's opportunity for solitude within the evaluated area. Factors to consider may include topography, presence of screening, distance from impacts, degree of permanent intrusions, and pervasive sights and sounds from outside the area.
 - b. Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include observing wildlife, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature.
3. Evaluate how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size to make its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition

practicable.

4. Evaluate the degree to which the area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. These values are not required to be present in an area for the area to be recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist. Such features or values may include:
 - a. Rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems. Rare can be determined locally, regionally, nationally, or within the system of protected designations.
 - b. Outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies, or geologic features.
 - c. Historic and cultural resource sites. (Confidentiality requirements with respect to cultural resource sites must be respected (25 U.S.C 3056)).
 - d. Research natural areas.
 - e. High quality water resources or important watershed features.
5. Evaluate the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics. Consider such factors as:
 - a. Shape and configuration of the area;
 - b. Legally established rights or uses within the area;
 - c. Specific Federal or State laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics;
 - d. The presence and amount of non-Federal land in the area; and
 - e. Management of adjacent lands.

72.2 – Documentation for Evaluated Areas

The Responsible Official shall ensure that the Interdisciplinary Team documents the evaluation and include this documentation, along with map(s) required by section 71.4 of this Handbook, in an appendix to the applicable NEPA document. The intent is to ensure that the process for inventory and evaluation is transparent and accessible to the public for input and feedback. This documentation will also be available for participation opportunities during the plan revision or development process.